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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 003166

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [CASC](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN DEMOCRACY ACTIVIST FACES LAWSUITS

REF: A. OSC SERIAL FEA20071011358627

[1](#)B. CAIRO 1855

[1](#)C. CAIRO 1727

[1](#)D. CAIRO 1690

[1](#)E. CAIRO 1499

Classified by ECPO Minister Counselor William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Saad Eddin Ibrahim (SEI), the prominent Egyptian-American democracy activist, faces four separate lawsuits for "spreading false news" and trying to harm Egypt's economy by calling for cuts in U.S. assistance to Egypt. Court proceedings in the four lawsuits, all filed by private Egyptian citizens who are reportedly close to the GOE, will commence on November 8, 18, 20, and December 1, according to media reporting. If convicted, SEI reportedly could face up to three years in prison in each lawsuit. The GOE has disavowed playing any role in the lawsuits against SEI. Civil society activists, including SEI's wife Barbara, worry that the lawsuits are part of new effort by the GOE to crack down on domestic dissent. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The dean of Egypt's democracy activists, SEI fought a lengthy legal battle from 2000-2003 against GOE charges that he had defamed Egypt and illegally accepted foreign funds for his civil society organization, the Ibn Khaldun Center (IKC). The 2000-2003 episode eventually resulted in SEI's complete exoneration by Egypt's highest court of appeals. IKC has been the beneficiary of a MEPI grant since 2005. SEI has regularly excoriated the Mubarak government in op-ed articles published in the independent Egyptian press and in outlets such as the Washington Post (ref E). In May, SEI played a leading role in the Doha Arab Reform Conference (ref D). In June, SEI participated in the Prague Conference on Democracy and Security, which President Bush addressed (ref C). After the Prague conference, SEI recounted for the Egyptian media his characterization of a conversation he had held with President Bush. According to SEI, he told President Bush that President Mubarak is "too old" to embrace meaningful democratic reform. SEI's June comments sparked a sharply negative reaction in the official and pro-GOE media with several commentators calling for his trial on treason charges (ref B). SEI has not returned to Egypt since June.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In early October, unnamed GOE security services announced that they had arrested 62 members of a terror network who were plotting to attack IKC with a car bomb (ref A). The GOE has provided no additional details on the alleged attack.

[1](#)4. (C) On October 22-23, SEI attended a Forum for the Future (FFF) preparatory meeting in Berlin. Ambassador Raouf Saad, the MFA's point man for FFF planning, called the DCM on

October 20, upon learning that SEI would be presenting a paper on Egypt's reform process in Berlin, to object strongly to SEI's participation. MFA Deputy Assistant Minister for Human Rights Affairs, Wael Aboulmagd, who also attended the FFF planning meeting in Berlin, told poloff on October 29 that the FFF meeting in Berlin had gone smoothly, and that SEI "is free to return to Egypt whenever he wants." Aboulmagd asserted that the GOE's Public Prosecutor's office has simply registered lawsuits filed by private citizens against SEI and is taking no prosecutorial role in the cases.

(Note: Aboulmagd's insistence that the GOE is not behind the lawsuits against SEI does not negate the fact that if one or more of the judges were to rule against SEI, and the rulings were to be sustained on appeal, the GOE would eventually be required to enforce the judicial ruling against SEI. End note.)

15. (C) In an October 28 meeting, SEI's wife Barbara Ibrahim, an Amcit professor at the American University in Cairo, told poloff that SEI plans to remain based in Doha for the foreseeable future, continuing his work with the Arab Democracy Foundation (which is funded by donations from the Qatari ruling family). Ms. Ibrahim also opined that SEI would likely be convicted in one or more of the cases--"since the low level judges are in the pocket of the Government"--and that he might then face a quandary if he were to pursue an appeal, since Egyptian law appears to require an appellant to be physically present in Egypt in order to pursue an appeal.

16. (C) Other civil society contacts told us the lawsuits against SEI represent a worrisome trend in the GOE's apparent effort to muzzle civil society and the independent press. As with recent convictions of independent journalists, the cases

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against SEI were filed by private citizens reportedly with close links to the government and/or ruling party, a move which permits the GOE some deniability, however implausible. RICCIARDONE